Maybe a Spoof . . . Surely a Squib

By GWEN CASH

Sex Shocker a Soporific

LIKE MOST of this continent and England, "Lolita," supposedly the naughtiest novel of the decade, written by Russian-born Vladimir Nabokov, is proving popular in Victoria, too.

It's striking three-inch-high title glares at you in the homes of most of those who call themselves intellectuals.

This I learned from a well-read bookwoman who told me passionately she hated to sell "Lolita."

"Of course, if customers ask for it, I have to."

She said this with much the sort of distaste a non-drinker would display at being asked to pour an alcoholic a pony of brandy.

According to her an astounding number of people in Victoria are reading "Lolita."

"It shows a trend," she said.

"What sort of a trend?" I asked.

"Towards an unhealthy preoccupation with lust," she told me.

Hitherto "Lolita" hadn't come my way. I knew vaguely it was first published in Paris before it could find a publisher in the United States and had come under fire in the British House of Commons, but somehow I'd missed reading a single review.

Now I decided to do a bit of unbiased research.

Outside the streets of Victoria looked much as usual. Old ladies with string bags; a lot of dogs; a group of flannel-bagged males—most of them with touches of silver in their hair and one wearing a beret, lingering at the entrance of a sporting goods store and discussing the opening of the trout season; housewives buying rose bushes and looking at new spring hats; gulls along the waterfront.

Look where I would I didn't see a single lascivious eye anywhere.

At the Marionette Library, Gwen Scott said her clientile weren't much interested in "Lolita."

"They are more likely to ask for "The Law" by the Spanish writer Roger Vailland or Boris Pasternak's "Dr. Zhivago."

"Books like 'Lolita' have been done before," said Miss Scott, "and better."

At Ford's Book Store, 623 Yates, I asked Henry Ford, "Are you selling many copies of 'Lolita'."

Henry nodded.

"To whom?" I asked careful of my grammar for I was talking to an erudite young bookman.

Henry grinned, "Mostly to women between the ages of 30 and 50 but to quite a few men, too. The only difference is when women come in and ask for 'Lolita' and then find out the price (it's $5.75, a whole dollar and a quarter more than that of the average novel) lots of them hastily switch to 'Peyton Place' at 50 cents, hoping that 'Lolita' will soon be a paper back, too."

At home I settled down to reading "Lolita."

Now, I'm an omniverous reader. Since I was knee high to a dictionary I've been a bookworm. As a child when I was sent to dust the polished surround in the drawing room, I did it with a duster tied round my foot and my nose in a book. Like Dr. Johnson, lexicographer, I can tear the heart out of a book with the greatest of ease. I read history, philosophy, fiction, poetry and when I'm stuck, labels on cans. Reading will always be my favorite form of entertainment, far ahead of radio, television, movies, pub-crawling, dancing, flirting or even theatre. And I read and re-read the books I love times without number.

But I'll never want to re read "Lolita."

It put me to sleep.

Frankly I found it boring. As far as I'm concerned, it's for the birds.

Who wants to read 310 pages concerned only with the illicit relations between a middle-aged European and a brash little American girl, who at 12, probably knew more about sex than her grandmother did when she died—even if they are cemented with colorful phrases like "a row of parked cars, like pigs at a trough," "red bluffs inkblotted with junipers," "two-dimensioned dove-grey clouds fusing with the distant amorous mist."

And did you ever come across anything quite as sickening as this passage, "The fragility of those bare arms of yours—how I longed to enfold them, all your four limpid lovely limbs, a folded colt, and take your head between my unworthy hands and pull the temple-skin back on both sides and kiss your chinesed eyes?"

It reads like something out of a confession pulp, doesn't it?

My guess is that this Nabokov wrote "Lolita" as a spoof, to see how much the public would swallow.

As for shocking, heck, at the beginning of the century publishers couldn't get away with printing "damn" and quite a bit later Shaw's "not bloody likely" in Pygmalion shook London to bits. Today psychology, neurology, psychiatry, two world wars, Korea, communism and the atom bomb leave little with which to shock people.

Vladimir Nabokov has done his boring best but it's a pretty wet squib.

Books and Authors

$1.000 Prize . . . **. . . A.G. Storey**

ALBERTAN WINS RYERSON AWARD

ARTHUR G. STOREY has won the Ryerson fiction award for 1959. A member of the faculty of the University of Alberta, Mr. Storey is the 18th winner of the now annual award by Ryerson Press. Intrinsic value of the prize is $1,000.

The book, Prairie Harvest, is the tale of a homesteading family in Saskatchewan, a fairly familiar theme, which comes to grief in the terrible drought years. But the strength of the story is in its characterization.

Storey left the University of Saskatchewan for overseas service with the army for three war years. He took his degree in arts on his return, and in education the following year.

He has been a teacher ever since, except for a year of post-graduate work at Stanford.

Married on his return from overseas, and father of three children, Mr. Storey's education was only achieved by tremendous application and hard work. His novel gives the same impression of dedication.

THE STAMP PACKET By R. M. ANGUS

COW for CARRIER

There are many ways of delivering mail: on foot, camel, horse and in this modern age, by helicopter. But possibly the strangest of all is that adopted by Ruanda-Urandi in Africa. When a tribal chief wishes to communicate with another chief, the letter is borne in a cleft stick by a man driving a cow before him over many leagues of country and some days of travel. The cow actually constitutes the stamp paid on the letter, thus becoming the largest postage medium in the world, though hardly one which can be found in a catalogue or mounted in a collection.

Then there is the Tin Can Mail where, due to the shallows, ships cannot approach the shore and mail has to be swum ashore carried in a tin can on the head of a native to the Island of Niaufou. So many natives were eaten by sharks in this process that the method was abandoned and mail delivered by boat.

The genuine original covers bear nothing but the word "Niaufou" in large purple block-type letters but as soon as these became known as Tin Can Mail, these words appeared on the covers together with all kinds of fancy cachets, none authorized by any postal authority and all more or less bogus.

About two days sail from Glasgow, on the rim of the outer Hebrides, is the loneliest of all Scottish isles—St. Kilda. Exposed to the full force of Atlantic gales, it is cut off from all communication with civilization except for the occasional visit of the factor.

When the natives desired to send news to their friends, they cut a hole in a solid piece of wood roughly hewn like a boat, and placed in it a small cannister or bottle containing a letter and request that whosoever picked it up would post it to its destination, a penny being enclosed for that purpose. A lid was nailed over the cavity with the words, "Please open" cut on it and after attaching a sheepskin bladder, the boat was cast into the sea during a westerly wind. An average of four out of six of these little mailboats were picked up either on the shores of Long Island or Norway, and their contents dispatched.

St. Kilda became well known to the public when Richard and Cherry Kearton published their book "With Nature and a Camera" in 1896. All that sustained the Aslanders was sheep raising, fishing and the gathering of the feathers of the fulmar petrel with which the island abounds, the feathers being used commercially to stuff army pillows, much to the disgust of the army they never lost their noisome odor. The inhabitants of St. Kilda were ultimately evacuated to more civilized surroundings.

On April 2, Canada will issue a 5-cent blue and white stamp to mark the tenth anniversary of NATO. The globe of the world showing NATO countries appears in the centre encircled by the words "Tenth Anniversary" in both French and English. A dove with olive branch is shown in the upper left corner, and the words NATO on either side of stamp. Designer is Philip Weiss, Ottawa. There will be an issue of 32,000,000.